

Submission to Infrastructure & Environment Committee

Re-Imagining Yonge Support December 1, 2020

I am President of the West Lansing Homeowners' Association; a community of approximately 1,200 homes bordered to the North by Sheppard Avenue, to the South by the 401, to the East by Yonge St and to the West by the Don Valley . Myself and many of our 11 Board members have participated in the ongoing discussions of this project over the past few years. Though we might not be speaking on behalf of every member in our community, our Board is unanimous in supporting the plan. It's time to stop studying and start implementing. The following is a circular we did last week to our membership that summarizes our process and our thoughts:

Something big is coming to North York, and it's the sort of project which people seem to react badly to on instinct. We know this, because most of us on your WLHA Board had this exact reaction to it when we first heard about it!

We're talking about Reimagining Yonge Street, the project to transform the section of Yonge Street from Avondale/Florence to the Hydro corridor north of Finch, into a pedestrian and cyclist-friendly downtown centre for the 100,000 people who, like us, live within a short walk or bike ride of North York Centre. This project is timed to coincide with major remedial reconstruction of Yonge St. infrastructure which is needed whether the project proceeds or not. Delay for further study would cost the City tens of millions more.

The critics of this project immediately over-simplify it to be nothing more than "removing two lanes of traffic and replacing them with bike lanes". They cast it as part of a "war against the car" etc. But as we learned when attending the SIX public consultation meetings in relation to the project back in 2017 and 2018, the project has much more to it than that! What is also critical in reviewing the project is having a long-term view of what the North York City Core should look like 25 years from now and beyond.

What many people don't realize is that the North York Centre area was always planned as a higher density "town centre" type area, with the "ring roads" Beecroft and Doris to divert traffic away from the main street. As we all know, the density of new high-rise developments which were part of that plan, have arrived and are continuing. This makes sense, as it has the 2nd busiest subway in North America running under the street. Furthermore, the province has decided to extend the already overcrowded Yonge line, northward to Richmond Hill. Every new station along that extended line will have an 800 metre radius "Major Transit Station Area" with a *minimum* required density that cannot be achieved without large numbers of new high-rise condo developments. In fact Yonge & Steeles is already attracting developer attention and will have dozens of 40-50 storey condo towers built within the next 10-20 years. There is already a proposal for 6 towers on the NW corner.

In our view, it's time we had a "town centre" in North York! Something with broad sidewalks suitable for outdoor patios, and with protected bike lanes so riding a bike to and from the shops and businesses and subway stations, doesn't involve taking your life into your hands, riding on the sidewalk illegally, or threading your way through back streets with a 4 way stop at every corner.

Yonge St is currently trying to be all things to all people. There are 14 lanes for traffic between the six (rush hour) lanes on Yonge and the four lanes on each of Beecroft and Doris. The traffic on Yonge proper consists about 74% of cars from York region going to and from the 401. The notion of having what amounts to a commuter highway, coexisting with a high density urban, pedestrian and transport-centred region of the city is just totally impossible. Since the density is here to stay

and is increasing exponentially, there's no going back. With the subway about to become essentially a commuter train for York region passengers, it seems high time to convince the remaining York region drivers to find another route to the 401- or at least to take Doris and Beecroft as the planners originally intended.

The consequences for West Lansing aren't all positive- all change comes with some downsides. Your drive time from Sheppard to north of Steeles or vice versa might increase by about a minute, per the traffic studies. You won't be able to park on Yonge anymore (if you were brave enough to do that before) so the remaining four lanes will actually be four full traffic lanes rather than two. More importantly, unless we take measures in advance of this plan, we will have more traffic infiltration into our neighbourhood as a result of people using Google Maps and Waze to avoid congestion. There will also be turn restrictions coming as part of the plan. The left turn currently permitted at Johnston from Yonge St. northbound will be eliminated and left turn restrictions from Yonge onto Sheppard are also likely. We're already making plans for a major consultation with West Lansing residents, the councillor's office and City traffic staff, to combat the infiltration and keep our streets as safe as we can.

Carrying the project all the way to the 401, was not possible as a result of the Province's control over the portion of Yonge nearest the 401. That area from the 401 to Sheppard will remain 6 lanes, with no room for protected bike lanes where they are most needed to carry cyclists safely under the 401 away from the 401 exits which are a lethal danger for cyclists. Hopefully, a re-configuration study for the Yonge/401 intersection might consider an accommodation.

The idea of pushing the bike lanes onto either Doris or Beecroft was in fact studied in detail and rejected. Because the 401 is off limits, the purpose of the bike lanes isn't to serve people trying to bike downtown, but to provide cycle access to the businesses in the North York Centre area, as well as to the subway stations. The lanes will extend to the Hydro corridor where you can bike clear across North York, totally free of traffic except at signalized crossings. An equally important consideration was the incremental \$26 Million on top of the \$60Million it would cost to put bike lanes onto those service roads instead of on Yonge.

As we attended the public consultations, asked tough questions of the City staff and councillor's office and became more informed about the project, our opinions about it turned around. This is a once in a generation opportunity for the City to do something FOR West Lansing residents. While we realize that we do not speak for everyone in West Lansing on this subject, this project is supported unanimously by all of your 11 Board members. However, we also feel strongly that it should be accompanied with a corresponding plan to protect our streets with concrete measures implemented to prevent more traffic spilling over to the residential streets of West Lansing as the result of more traffic on Beecroft.

Your West Lansing Homeowners' Association Board

**Michael Capotosto, President
West Lansing Homeowners' Association**